

Poesía

Cameron Awkward-Rich

Trans Study (1)

*we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with
suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness
which so often seems like their only alternative*

—Audre Lorde

Transsexual is a word my students don't understand how I could want. I get it. I do. No one likes to imagine their heart enabled by capital, power-knowledge, etc. No one wants to know the field, first, as boundary

Who wouldn't want, instead, to roam?

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There's a scene that sits, for me, at the center of the story. There, not even the moon is cutting though. I'm outside and can't imagine how my body is moving. It's in the groove, not a good thing, exactly. The groove is something we fall into, a rut, rutting against. Anyway, I am outside the room I am inside, which is perfectly ordinary. The trouble. I used to think there was a series of movements at the end of which: joy.

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One trouble with *the transsexual* is the history of her description. At the edges of the field, a body so alienated from itself it is functionally dead, *a monstrous fetter. He lives only for the day when his "[] soul" is no longer being outraged by his [] body, when he can function []— socially, legally, and sexually. In the meantime, he is often [dead to pleasure, to the world outside her head].*

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Metaphor is important. Or, it's my job to say so. Take Lorde's *tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched like a topaz just inside the clear skin. If yellow pellet stands*

for “capacity for joy,” then you have to admit that capacity unfolding in and because of war. Likewise, *the transsexual* unfolds.

I is never actually a dead-space, I’m trying to convince myself. It wants only what it is possible to want, which is more than we know. I want the word, I tell my students, as a record. A figure for how the barely possible becomes, through feeling, *a kind of life*.

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In the field, we lie on our backs and watch the sky moving overhead. We sprawl. We holler. We stand quiet as stones in our own pockets. We wander. We roam. We come back home though in the meantime the description’s changed —

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Tomato. Salt. Bright sting of the needle. Monstera. Buttercup. Breeze through the summer window. My friends, my friends. *Writing a good poem. Moving into the sunlight against the body of the woman I love.* Suddenly, rain.

Sterile

Because I could not drive, because I swore
I'd never, I sat in the waiting room, slick

and winded and helmet-addled.
I was there to start a new life.

On the good days, my high-school
girlfriend would write me letters

describing weekend plans, evasion
tactics, dreams of a future

unloosed from her mother's rage—
the two of us, middle-aged

and ordinary: porch swing, minivan,
children, etc. And because, by then,

I hated her—or, rather, hated what I became
clenched in her mind's fist—it was easy

to sign the paperwork. To acknowledge
and consent. Yes. It was my life. I wanted to

tend nothing, least of all my own, septic mind.
It was hardly a decision—I took the medicine,

I rode, unblinking, into the one body I would bear.
Love, it's true. I was young. A child.

What did I know about what I deserve?

Cameron Awkward-Rich is a poet and scholar of transgender theory and cultural production. He is the author of two poetry collections, *Sympathetic Little Monster* (2016) and *Dispatch* (2019), and his scholarly writing has been published in *Signs*, *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, *American Quarterly*, and elsewhere. Awkward-Rich is an assistant professor of women, gender, sexuality studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.